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STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

At the 4005th meeting of the Security Council, held on 15 May 1999 in connection with the Council's consideration of the item entitled "The situation in Sierra Leone" the President of the Security Council made the following statement on the behalf of the Council:

"The Security Council stresses that an overall political settlement and national reconciliation are essential to achieving the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Sierra Leone. In this context, it welcomes the recent holding of internal talks by a rebel delegation in Lome, and urges the Government of Sierra Leone and rebel representatives to ensure that there are no further obstacles to a start to direct talks without delay.

"The Security Council calls upon all concerned to remain committed to the process of negotiation and to demonstrate flexibility in their approach to the process. In this context, the Council underlines its strong support for the mediation efforts of the United Nations within the Lome process, in particular the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to facilitate dialogue, and for the key role being played by the President of Togo.

"The Security Council commends, once again, the continued efforts of the Government of Sierra Leone and the Military Observer Group of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOMOG) towards the restoration of peace, security and stability in Sierra Leone, and calls for sustained support for ECOMOG from the international community.

"The Security Council condemns the recent killings, atrocities, destruction of property and other violations of human rights and international humanitarian law perpetrated on civilians by the rebels in recent attacks, in particular at Masiaka and Port Loko. It calls upon the rebels to cease such actions immediately and urges the rebel leadership to release all hostages and abductees without delay.

"The Security Council urges both parties to commit themselves to a cessation of hostilities for the duration of the Lome talks, to ensure that this is fully respected on the ground and to work constructively, and in good faith for a ceasefire agreement. It calls upon both sides to refrain from any hostile or aggressive act which could undermine the talks process.

"The Security Council welcomes the intention of the Secretary-General to increase, as security conditions permit, the presence on the ground of the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL) within currently authorized levels, in anticipation of a cessation of hostilities. The Council also welcomes the Secretary-General's intention to send an assessment team to Sierra Leone to examine how an expanded UNOMSIL with a revised mandate and concept of operations might contribute to the implementation of a ceasefire and peace agreement in the event of a successful outcome to the negotiations between the Government of Sierra Leone and the rebels, and expresses its readiness to consider recommendations from the Secretary-General to that end.

"The Security Council stresses, however, that it will be prepared to consider deploying monitors throughout Sierra Leone only when a credible ceasefire is in place and is being respected by all sides, and there is a commitment of all parties to a framework peace agreement.

"The Security Council underlines the importance, in the context of a lasting solution to the conflict in Sierra Leone, of a plan for the internationally supervised disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants, including child soldiers. It also draws attention to the need for the secure and timely disposal of collected arms, in accordance with any peace agreement reached.

"The Security Council reaffirms the obligation of all States to comply strictly with the provisions of the embargo on the sale or supply of arms and related matériel imposed by its resolution 1171 (1998) of 5 June 1998.

"The Security Council reiterates its grave concern at the humanitarian situation in Sierra Leone and urges all parties, in particular the rebel leadership, to guarantee safe and unhindered humanitarian access to all those in need.

"The Security Council reiterates that a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict in Sierra Leone remains the responsibility of the Government and people of Sierra Leone, but again emphasizes the strong commitment of the international community to support a sustainable peace settlement.

"The Security Council will remain seized of the matter."